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UNCLAS AMMAN 003907

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PD; SA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OUTREACH ACTION ON ALLEGED KORAN
DESECRATION

Ref: State 090992

1. Post raised the Koran desecration issue with the GOJ and widely distributed the Secretary's comments and the Newsweek retraction to the media and our journalist contacts in addition to posting them on the Embassy Webpage. While the Jordanian press prominently reported "Islamic outrage" and protests as well as calls for investigation by the GOJ spokesperson and Parliamentarians, local reaction on the street was limited to a rally by the Islamic Action Front, originally called to protest Israeli extremist threats to al-Aqsa. End Summary.

2. On May 17, the Foreign Minister's first day back from a trip to Brazil, the Charge raised with Foreign Minister Qasrawi the Secretary's statement underlining U.S.

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respect for the Koran and the Newsweek retraction. Qasrawi said the Secretary's statement had been effective in dispelling negative sentiment in Jordan. He mentioned that he had been called to discuss this issue with the foreign relations committee of the upper house of parliament, and would highlight the Charge's comments, including the Secretary's statement and the retraction. He recommended against any Embassy public statement, saying that at this point it would only contribute additional energy to press reporting on the controversy.

3. Meanwhile, over the past week the Mission took the following action on the Koran story. PA posted Secretary Rice's statement on the reports of the desecration on our website and distributed it to the full list of media contacts. Subsequently PA also distributed the Newsweek apology story and retraction plus selected quotes from senior USG officials, which were reported by several local dailies.

4. Local media over the past week featured the rioting in South Asia sparked by the incident as well as statements by GOJ spokesperson Asma Khadr calling for an investigation and punishment if the allegations were proven. They also reported a condemnation of the alleged desecration by the Lower House of Parliament. There were also a few editorials stating that the incident "if proven," would only reinforce the fact that the U.S. fails to respect Islam and is not serious about its calls for freedom and tolerance in the region. (A special media reaction on the Koran desecration will follow via septel.)

5. Minimize considered.

HALE